

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Marsha Blackburn
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Latest Developments in Combating Online Sex Trafficking”
November 30, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

Good afternoon and a warm welcome to all of our witnesses. We have come here together on this beautiful afternoon to talk about a very ugly subject: online sex trafficking, or as the name of Ms. Smith’s organization describes it more bluntly, slavery. As the stings and the headlines continue to proliferate, those who thought that slavery was something that could never happen in 2017 America, have had to confront the terrifying reality that not only is it happening, it is on the rise. And it is on the rise in large part because the Internet, the technological masterpiece of our time, has made it much, much easier to do.

In both the House and the Senate this year, we are facing up to the challenge with a long overdue conversation driving toward effective action. With this hearing, it is my hope that the Communications and Technology Subcommittee, with our particular focus, will add some valuable perspective about exactly what is going wrong and what is going right on the tech side as the lowest of the low harness the power of the Internet to enslave and exploit our children.

I am so very pleased that Ms. Smith and Mr. Winkle have been able to join us today to tell their stories of how Tennessee has been impacted by this abhorrent crime. Like so many of the districts that my colleagues here represent, our home has been invaded by criminals luring in vulnerable women and children, and forcing them into a life of sex slavery and unspeakable abuse. I know that you both share my deep sadness and outrage that this is happening in our own backyard, and I cannot thank you enough for rescuing these victims, then helping them heal while seeking justice for the abusers. You are truly doing the Lord’s work.

And you are doing a superlative job of it. For the fifth year in a row, Tennessee received an “A” on its report card in the Protected Innocence Challenge, a comprehensive annual study of existing state laws conducted by Shared Hope International. The challenge produces state report cards that rate how effectively each state responds to the crime of domestic minor sex trafficking. After four years of straight A’s, Tennessee outdid itself this year by leading the rankings, #1 in the country.

What a testimony to the partnership between Tennessee law enforcement and victim advocates that you have built and grown together over the years. We are honored that you would take time away from your important work to give us the latest perspective from the front lines.

The legislative debate this year has focused on amendments to section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which law enforcement has consistently identified as a barrier preventing effective prosecution of online entities that facilitate trafficking, and adequate recourse for trafficking victims. Today we welcome my colleague and dear friend Mrs. Wagner, who has led the charge in the House. I look forward to hearing her testimony about her efforts to find an effective approach to attack this problem we are all facing. She has been a passionate and tireless advocate, and I am proud to be a cosponsor of her bill. And I also look forward to hearing the perspectives and concerns of Ms. Souras and Mr. Goldman as we consider our next step. With so many women and children waiting on us and counting on us, standing still is not an option.